

Cooperation stressed at African American conference

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WACO—Cooperation, remembrance and thanksgiving emerged as key themes during the first day of the African American Fellowship Conference.

“We are called to cooperate,” said Pastor Michael Evans of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Mansfield, president of the Baptist General Convention of Texas. “We all need one another.”

Evans pointed to the contributions African American churches make as full partners in Texas Baptist life, alongside other racial, ethnic and language groups. He described the BGCT as a network of “transformational churches” working together to transform communities and advance God’s kingdom.

‘Rich in our diversity’

“We are rich in our diversity,” Evans told attendees at the 26th annual James W. Culp Banquet at First Woodway Baptist Church in Waco, 8. The event is named in memory of the longtime coordinator of black church development for Texas Baptists, who died last year.

Bethlehem Baptist in Mansfield was among the top giving African American churches to the BGCT Cooperative Program recognized at the banquet. Others were: New Beginnings Baptist Church in Lewisville, Pastor Joseph Fields; Community Missionary Baptist Church in DeSoto, Pastor Oscar Epps; Fort Bend Baptist Church in Sugar Land, Pastor Byron Stevenson; Cornerstone Baptist Church in Harker Heights, Pastor Edward Wagner; and The Church Without Walls in Houston, Pastor Ralph Douglas West.



The men's chorus from Bethlehem Baptist Church in Mansfield led in worship at the James W. Culp Banquet, held at the African American Fellowship Conference. (Photo / Ken Camp)

Evans urged believers spanning generations to learn from each other. Older Christians need young Christians to “fan the flames, igniting a passion for service,” he said.

At the same time, the rising generation needs to learn values—including distinctive Baptist principles such as soul competency and biblical authority—from their elders.

“You cannot move forward until you know where you’ve come from,” Evans said.

Pioneering presidents recognized

In that spirit, the African American Fellowship Conference recognized the organization's first seven presidents, who served from 1993 to 2007.

Three former fellowship presidents from that era were present at the banquet—the first president, Joseph Samuel Ratliff, pastor of Brentwood Baptist Church in Houston; the second, Howard E. Anderson, pastor of

Singing Hills Baptist Church in Dallas; and the fifth, Dennis W. Young, pastor of Missouri City Baptist Church near Houston and chair of the BGCT Executive Board.

The fellowship recognized two former presidents posthumously—Paul McBride, pastor of Friendship Baptist Church in The Colony, and Ronald G. Edwards, pastor of Minnehulla Baptist Church in Goliad.

The conference also recognized two past presidents who were unable to attend—Milton Walker, pastor of Community Baptist Church in El Paso, and Jerry William Dailey, pastor of Macedonia Missionary Baptist Church in San Antonio.

Record the legacy



Joseph Parker, pastor of David Chapel Missionary Baptist Church in Austin, to preserve the stories of early presidents of the African American Fellowship Conference. (Photo

/ Ken Camp)

Joseph Parker, pastor of David Chapel Missionary Baptist Church in Austin, referred to the early conference presidents not only as pioneers but as “the repositories of our tradition and heritage.”

African Americans have a strong oral tradition that honors storytellers, but they often neglect to preserve the history contained in the stories, he noted. Parker challenged the BGCT to lead an effort to protect that legacy by recording those stories.

Elmo Johnson, pastor of Rose of Sharon Missionary Baptist Church in Houston, who completed his term as president of the African American Fellowship, addressed pastors at a luncheon earlier in the day.

Reflecting on the first verse of Psalm 107, Johnson called on the pastors to give thanks. Like the people of Israel who were returning to Jerusalem after exile, God’s people need to “discover thanksgiving all over again,” he insisted.

Thanksgiving must be demonstrated, and the people of God express thanks to him by giving, Johnson said.

Believers should direct thanks to the right source, noting that God’s disposition provides reason for thanksgiving “for he is good,” he said.

And the duration of gratitude should match God’s grace, “for his mercy endures forever,” Johnson concluded.